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Africans see unfair distribution of COVID-19 relief assistance, loss of resources to corruption.

Josephine Appiah-Nyamekye Sanny

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Summary

The COVID-19 pandemic plunged Africa into its worst recession in more than 50 years, causing a 2.1% drop in Africa's gross domestic product in 2020 and pushing about 30 million Africans into extreme poverty in 2021. Already grappling with poverty and unemployment, the continent lost about 22 million jobs in 2021 (African Development Bank Group, 2021, 2022).
In a bid to slow the spread of the coronavirus, at least 42 African countries enforced restrictions such as lockdowns, curfews, border closures, travel bans, and the suspension of sports and recreational activities, all of which hindered income-generating activities (African Development Bank Group, 2021).
Governments and international development partners put in place a variety of economic support schemes aimed at buffeting the effects of the pandemic on vulnerable households and businesses (World Bank, 2020; UNDP Regional Bureau for Africa, 2021). While stimulus packages were designed to protect socio-economically vulnerable groups, studies show that fewer than two in 10 citizens and businesses benefited from government COVID-19 aid in 2020 (Human Rights Watch, 2021a; African Union, 2020; International Labour Organization, 2021).
In spite of governments' pledge to be transparent in the use of funds, the relief programs were plagued by corruption, fraud, and lack of transparency regarding procurement processes, expenditures, and beneficiaries (Human Rights Watch, 2021b; Oduor, 2021; United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2020).
Afrobarometer surveys conducted in 16 African countries in 2020/2021 show that few citizens reported benefiting from relief assistance offered by their governments. Many saw their governments as distributing assistance unfairly and said that at least some of the funds meant for the COVID-19 response were lost to corruption. Many also expressed distrust of government COVID-19 statistics. Despite these criticisms, majorities in almost all countries approved of their governments' overall handling of the pandemic.
While many citizens supported lockdowns as necessary, most also found it difficult to comply with the restrictions. Many citizens supported school closures to limit the spread of the virus but said the closures lasted too long. Citizens also indicated a willingness to put some democratic freedoms on hold in order to protect public health during a crisis but voiced concerns that politicians were using the pandemic as cover to increase their power.

Afrobarometer surveys

Afrobarometer is a pan-African, nonpartisan survey research network that provides reliable data on African experiences and evaluations of democracy, governance, and quality of life. Eight rounds of surveys have been completed in up to 39 countries since 1999. Round 8 surveys (2019/2021) cover 34 countries. In 16 countries surveyed between October 2020 and July 2021 – after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic – the questionnaire included a new module of questions related to COVID-19 (see Appendix Table A.1 for a list of countries and fieldwork dates).[1]
Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice with nationally representative samples of 1,200-2,400 adult citizens that yield country-level results with margins of error of +/-2 to +/-3 percentage points at a 95% confidence level.[2]

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[1] For Afrobarometer Round 8 findings related to COVID-19 vaccines, see Sanny (2022). Findings related to COVID-19, including vaccination rates and vaccine hesitancy, in countries surveyed during Round 9 (2021/2022) are being reported separately as they become available; see dispatches from Gabon, Lesotho, Mauritius, Namibia, Nigeria, and Zimbabwe.

[2] The weighted Mozambique Round 8 sample is nationally representative except that it excludes rural Cabo Delgado, comprising 6.3% of the adult population of Mozambique. Insecurity and

The data are weighted to ensure nationally representative samples. When reporting multi-country averages, all countries are weighted equally (rather than in proportion to population size). Due to rounding, reported totals may differ by 1 percentage point from the sum of sub-categories.

Key findings

- On average across 16 countries, one-third (33%) of citizens said a member of their household had lost a job, a business, or other primary source of income due to the pandemic, while 6% said a household member had become ill with COVID-19.

- On average across the 15 countries where governments provided relief assistance for vulnerable households and businesses, only about a quarter (27%) of citizens reported receiving such aid. The demographic profiles of who received aid varied widely by country.

- Strong majorities said their governments had done "fairly well" or "very well" in managing the response to the pandemic (67%) and in keeping the public informed about COVID-19 (80%). But on some aspects of the pandemic response, public assessments were more negative:

- More than six in 10 (63%) did not think their governments were fair in their distribution of relief assistance.

- Two-thirds (67%) said that "some" (24%) or "a lot" (43%) of the resources intended for the COVID-19 response were lost to corruption.

- Six in 10 (59%) said they do not trust government statistics on COVID-19 cases and deaths.

- On average across 14 countries where lockdowns or curfews were imposed, only a quarter (25%) of citizens said their households found it easy to comply with these restrictions.

- Majorities in all 14 countries said compliance was difficult.

- But more than three-fourths (77%) of citizens "agreed" or "strongly agreed" that lockdowns were necessary to limit the spread of COVID-19, even if they had a negative impact on the economy and people's livelihoods.

- Many citizens indicated a willingness to accept restrictions on certain democratic freedoms, at least temporarily, in the name of security and health:

- Seven in 10 (71%) "agreed" or "strongly agreed" that governments are justified in using the police and security forces to enforce public health mandates.

- A slim majority (53%) would tolerate postponing elections or limiting political campaigns during a public health emergency.

- Half (50%) would accept media censorship as justified during a crisis like the pandemic.

- Six in 10 citizens (60%) said they were worried that politicians were using the

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resulting difficulties in obtaining necessary fieldwork clearances prevented Afrobarometer from collecting sufficient data in this area.

pandemic as an excuse to increase their power.

Impact of COVID-19

On average across the 16 surveyed countries, one-third (33%) of citizens said a member of their household had lost a job, a business, or other primary source of income due to the pandemic (Figure 1). The economic fallout of the pandemic was felt most widely in Uganda (55%), Eswatini (50%), Zimbabwe (47%), and Senegal (47%), where around half of citizens reported the loss of a job or major source of income in the household. At the other extreme, fewer than two in 10 citizens in Benin (18%) and Niger (15%) shared this experience.

About one in 20 respondents (6%) said a member of their household had become ill with COVID-19, ranging from just 1% in Zambia, Togo, and Niger to double digits in South Africa (19%), Eswatini (15%), Morocco (13%), and Sudan (11%).

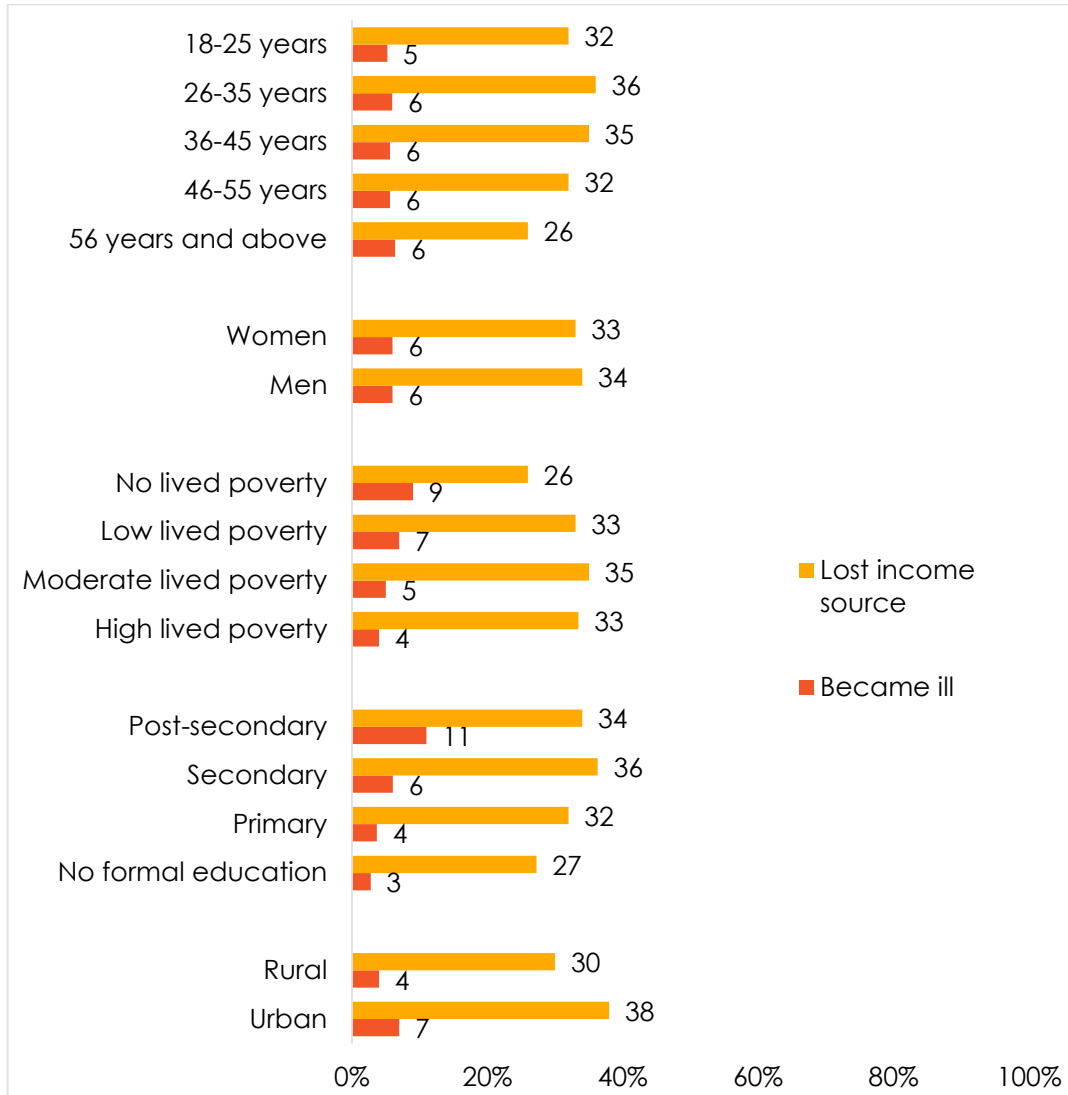**Figure 1: Impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic | 16 countries | 2020/2021**
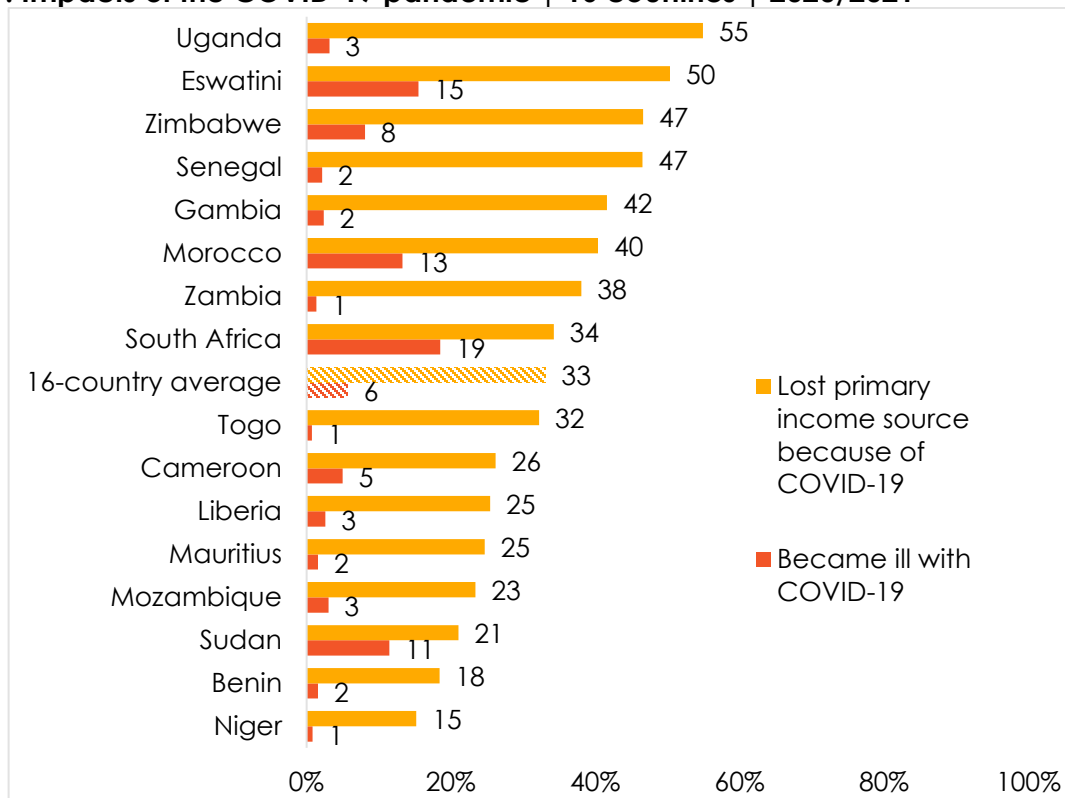
Respondents were asked: *Please tell me if you personally or any other member of your household have been affected in any of the following ways by the COVID-19 pandemic: Became ill with COVID-19? Temporarily or permanently lost a job, business, or primary source of income? (% "yes")*

The loss of a primary income source was less common among the wealthiest respondents (26%),[3]

[3] Afrobarometer's Lived Poverty Index (LPI) measures respondents' levels of material deprivation by asking how often they or their families went without basic necessities (enough food, enough water, medical care, enough cooking fuel, and a cash income) during the preceding year. For more on lived poverty, see Mattes (2020).

those with no formal education (27%), rural residents (30%), and elderly citizens (26%) (Figure 2). Urban residents (7%) and the wealthiest citizens (9%) were about twice as likely as rural dwellers (4%) and the poorest citizens (4%) to say that a household member had become ill with COVID-19. The likelihood of reporting a COVID-19 illness in the household increased with respondents' education (3% among those with no formal schooling vs. 11% among those with post-secondary qualifications).

**Figure 2: Impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic | by demographic group | 16 countries | 2020/2021**

Respondents were asked: *Please tell me if you personally or any other member of your household have been affected in any of the following ways by the COVID-19 pandemic: Became ill with COVID-19? Temporarily or permanently lost a job, business, or primary source of income? (% "yes")*

COVID-19 relief assistance

In 15 of the 16 surveyed countries, the government pledged to provide relief assistance for vulnerable households and businesses affected by the pandemic. But on average, only about a quarter (27%) of citizens reported receiving such aid (Figure 3). The Gambia and Senegal are the only countries where majorities (79% and 71%) reported receiving assistance. Fewer than two in 10 citizens received such aid in Benin (4%), Mozambique (7%), Zambia (7%), Liberia (9%), Zimbabwe (10%), Niger (14%), Cameroon (18%), and Uganda (19%).

On average across the 15 countries, assistance was somewhat more likely to go to citizens who lost a source of income due to the pandemic than to those who did not (35% vs. 24%). Citizens with no formal schooling (35%) were more likely to benefit from relief assistance than their educated counterparts (22%-28%) (Figure 4). No significant differences were recorded across other socio-demographic groups.
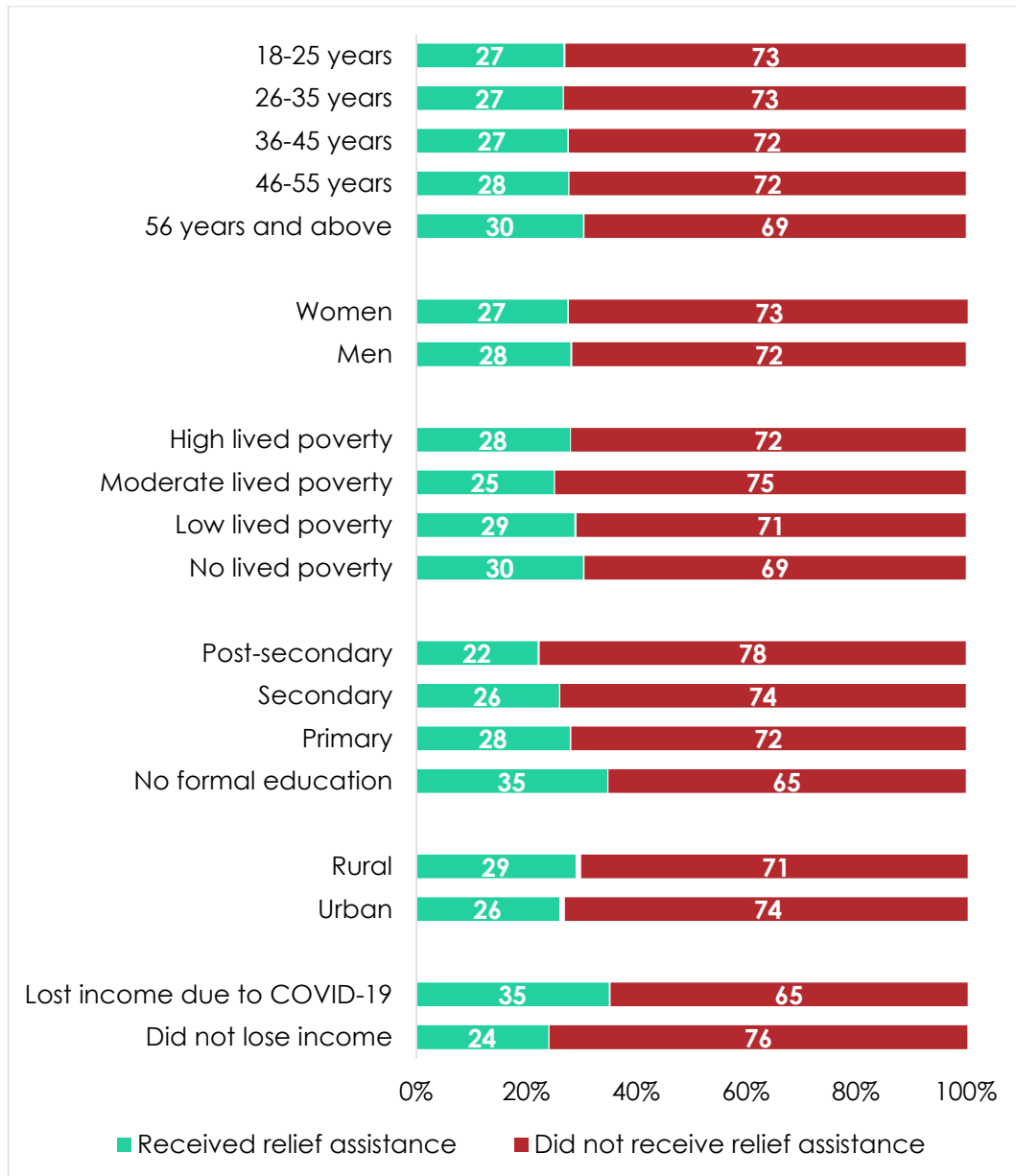
Figure 3: Received government assistance | 15* countries | 2020/2021
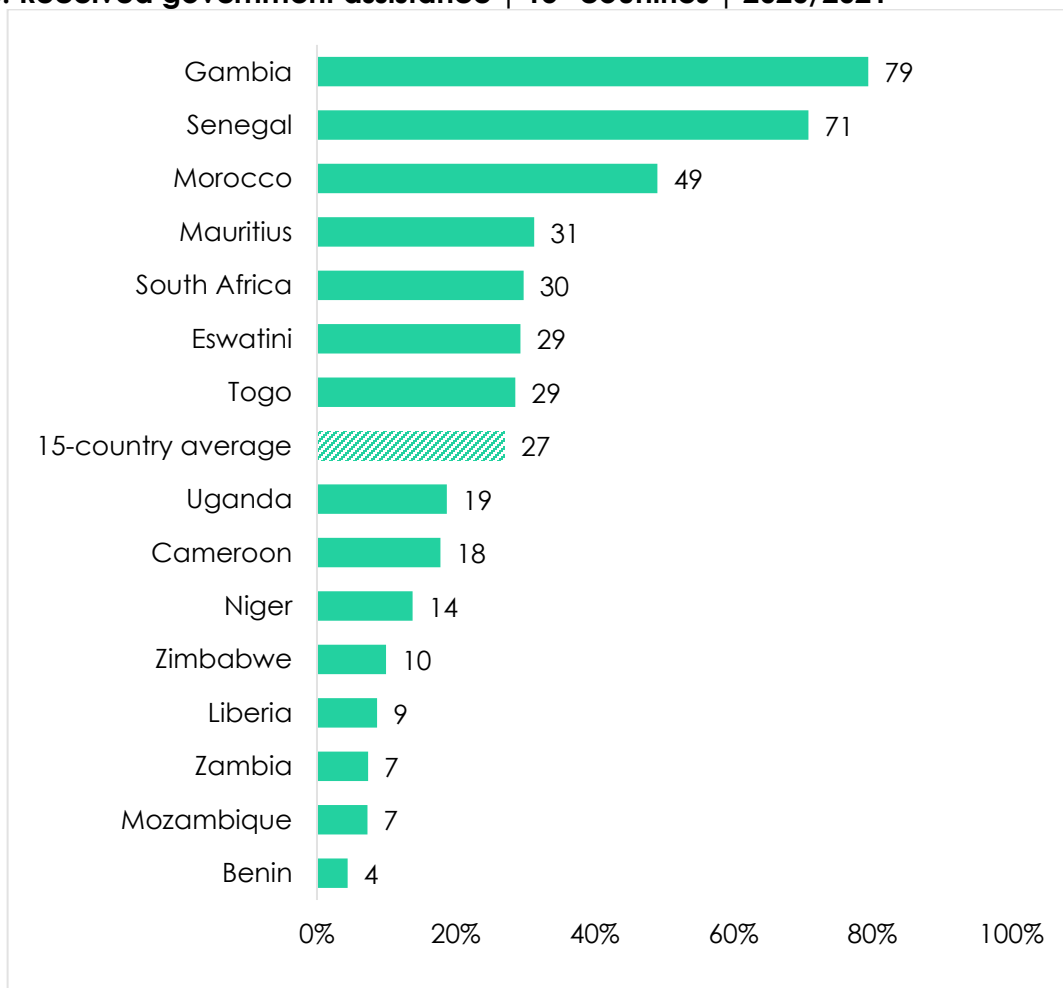
Respondents were asked: Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, have you or your household received any assistance from government, like food, cash payments, relief from bill payments, or other assistance that you were not normally receiving before the pandemic? (% "yes")
* Question was not asked in Sudan.

Figure 4: Received government assistance | by demographic group | 15* countries | 2020/2021

Respondents were asked: Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, have you or your household received any assistance from government, like food, cash payments, relief from bill payments, or other assistance that you were not normally receiving before the pandemic? (% "yes")
* Question was not asked in Sudan.

Within countries, demographic patterns of relief distribution varied widely. In line with the idea of helping the most vulnerable, poorer citizens were significantly more likely than the wealthy to receive aid in the Gambia, Morocco, Eswatini, and South Africa (Figure 5). In Niger, Liberia, and Mozambique, however, the wealthiest citizens were at least twice as likely as the poor to benefit from relief assistance.

In Togo, Uganda, Liberia, and Mozambique, urban residents were about twice as likely as rural

8

residents to receive assistance (Figure 6). But in six countries – the Gambia, Senegal, Morocco, Mauritius, Eswatini, and Cameroon – assistance was more likely to go to rural residents than to city dwellers.

In Togo, Zambia, and Uganda, highly educated citizens were far more likely than those with no formal schooling to report receiving assistance (Figure 7). The pattern is reversed in the Gambia, Senegal, Morocco, and Eswatini, where the uneducated benefited more frequently than those with post-secondary education.

Older citizens were more likely than young adults to report receiving assistance in the Gambia, Senegal, Eswatini, Mauritius, and Mozambique, whereas younger citizens in South Africa, Zimbabwe, Niger, and Liberia were far more likely than their older counterparts to benefit from aid (Figure 8). Figure 9 summarises demographic differences in who received COVID-19 relief assistance, reflecting the wide variation by country.
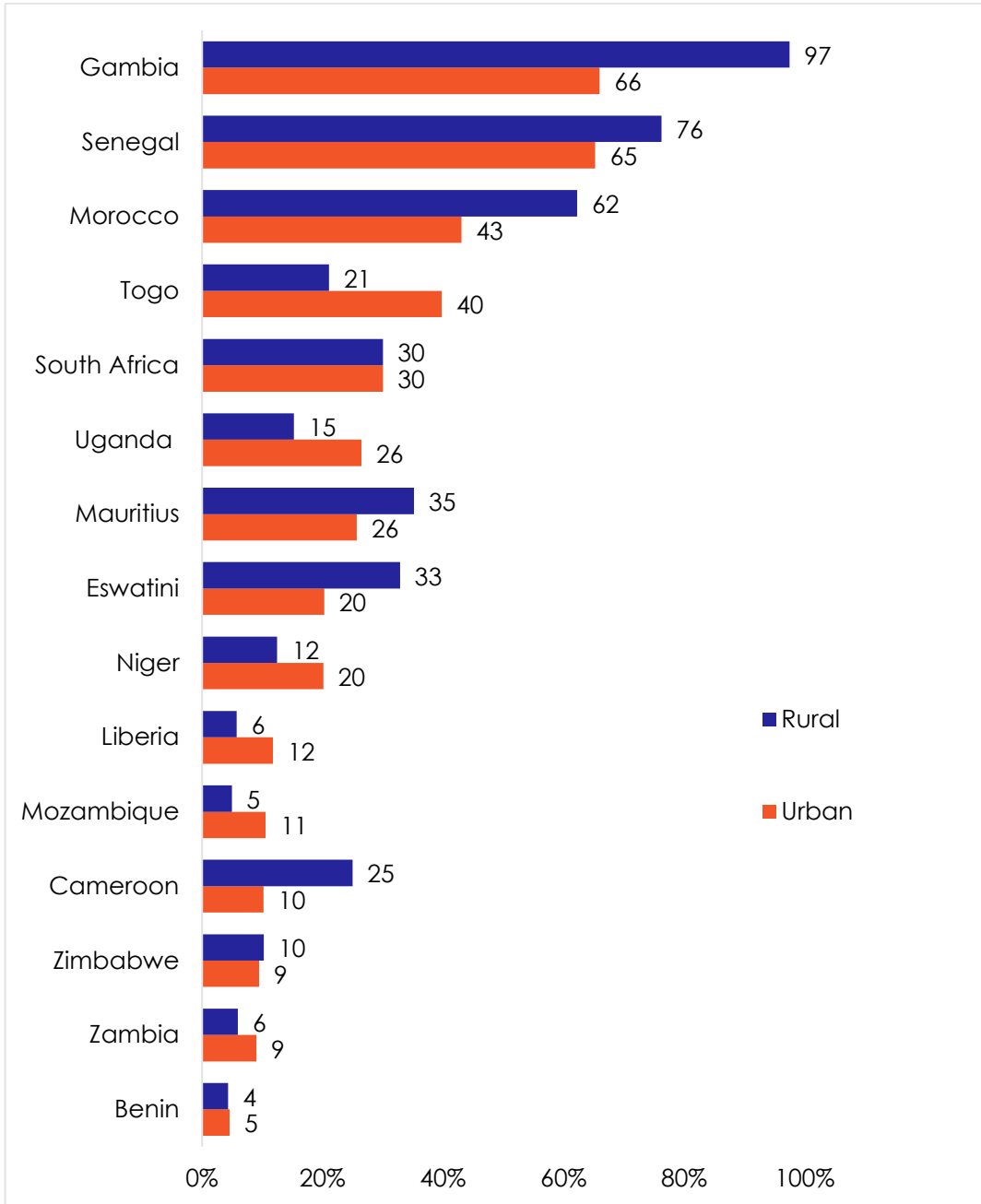
Figure 5: Received COVID-19 relief assistance | by lived poverty | 7* countries | 2020/2021
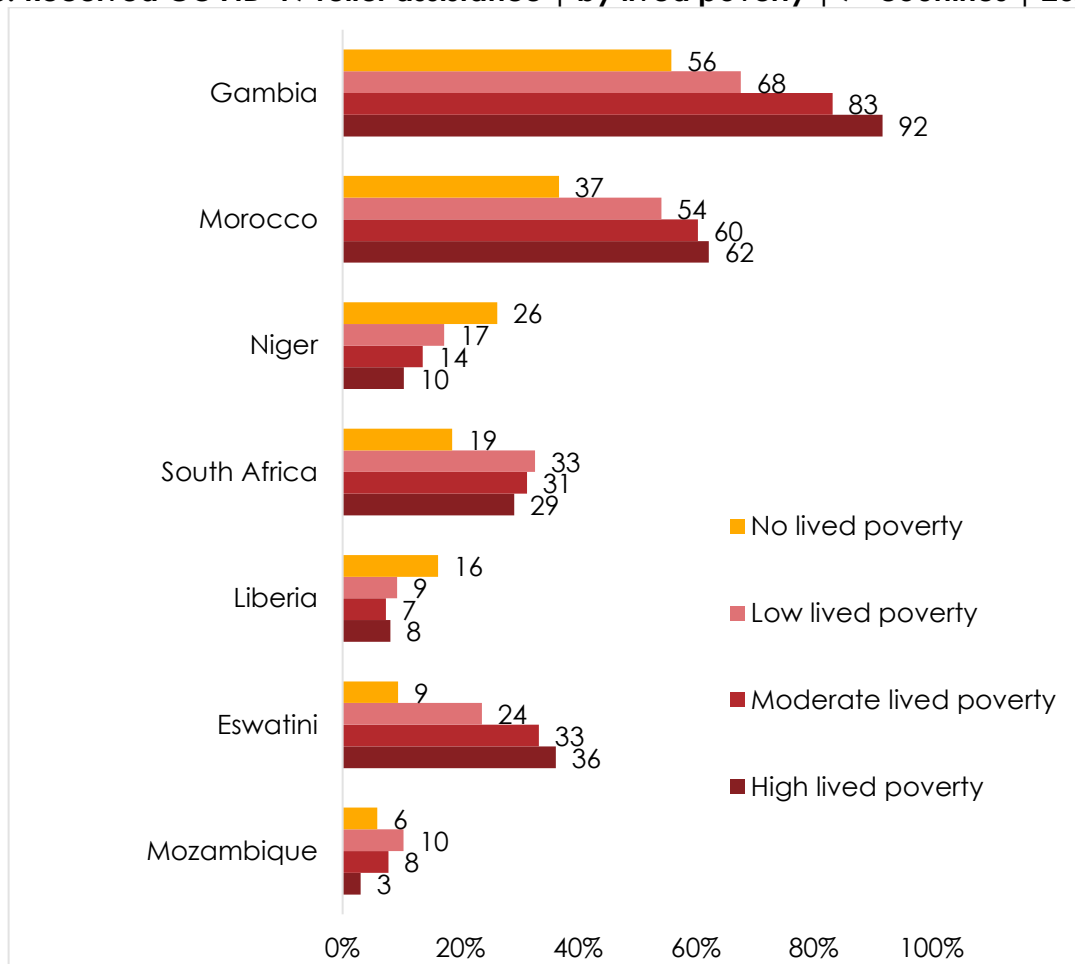
Respondents were asked: Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, have you or your household received any assistance from government, like food, cash payments, relief from bill payments, or other assistance that you were not normally receiving before the pandemic? (% "yes")
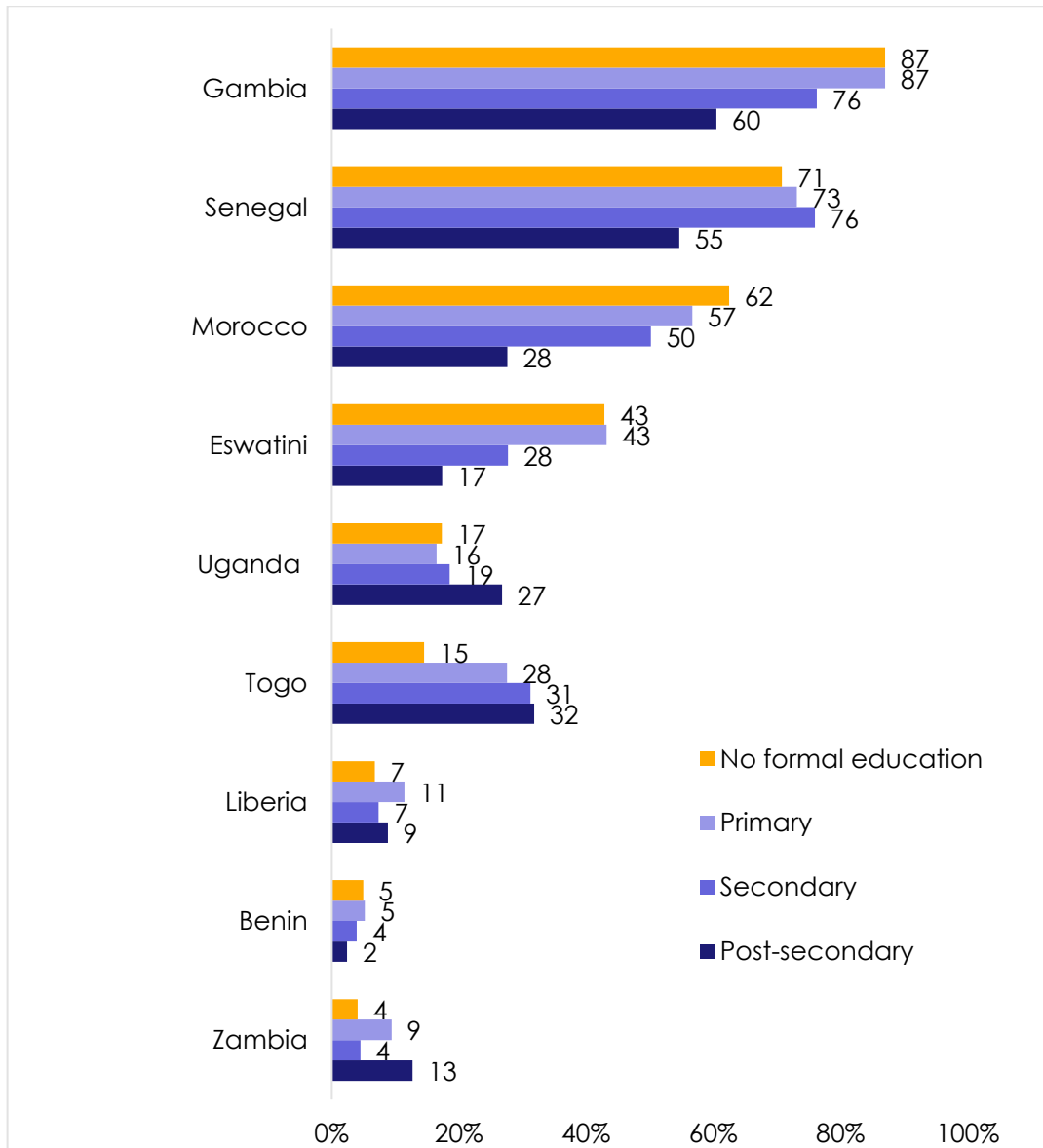** Question was not asked in Sudan. Results are not shown for Benin, Cameroon, Mauritius, Senegal, Togo, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe because the sub-samples of respondents with no lived poverty and/or high lived poverty were too small to provide meaningful results.*

Figure 6: Received COVID-19 relief assistance | by rural-urban residence| 15* countries | 2020/2021

Country	Rural	Urban
Gambia	97	66
Senegal	76	65
Morocco	62	43
Togo	21	40
South Africa	30	30
Uganda	15	26
Mauritius	35	26
Eswatini	33	20
Niger	12	20
Liberia	6	12
Mozambique	5	11
Cameroon	25	10
Zimbabwe	10	9
Zambia	6	9
Benin	4	5

Respondents were asked: Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, have you or your household received any assistance from government, like food, cash payments, relief from bill payments, or other assistance that you were not normally receiving before the pandemic? (% "yes")
* Question was not asked in Sudan.

Figure 7: Received COVID-19 relief assistance | by education level | 9* countries | 2020/2021

Respondents were asked: Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, have you or your household received any assistance from government, like food, cash payments, relief from bill payments, or other assistance that you were not normally receiving before the pandemic? (% "yes")
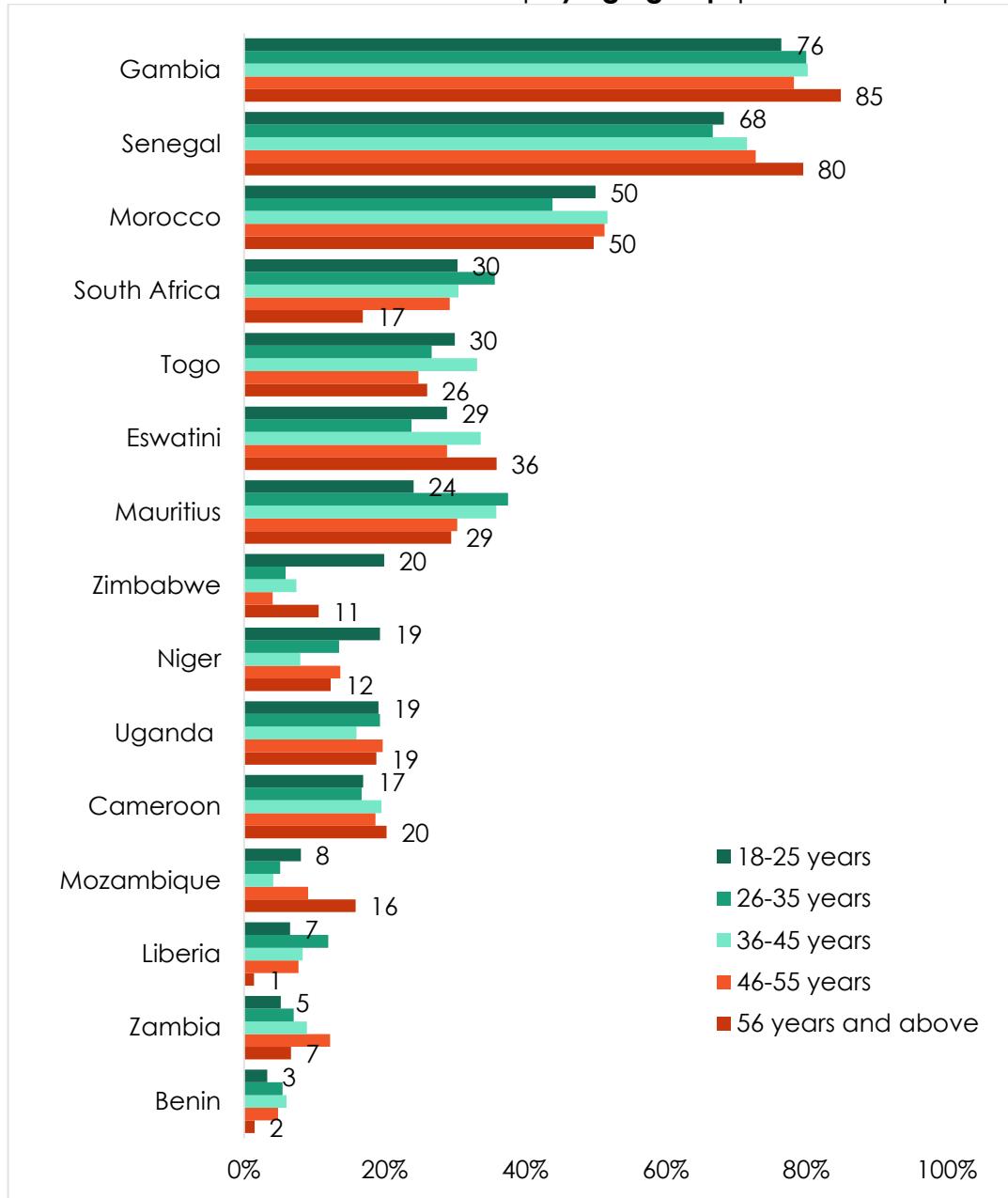*Question was not asked in Sudan. Results are not shown for Cameroon, Mauritius, Mozambique, Niger, South Africa, and Zimbabwe because the sub-samples of respondents with either post-secondary education or no formal education were too small to provide meaningful results.*

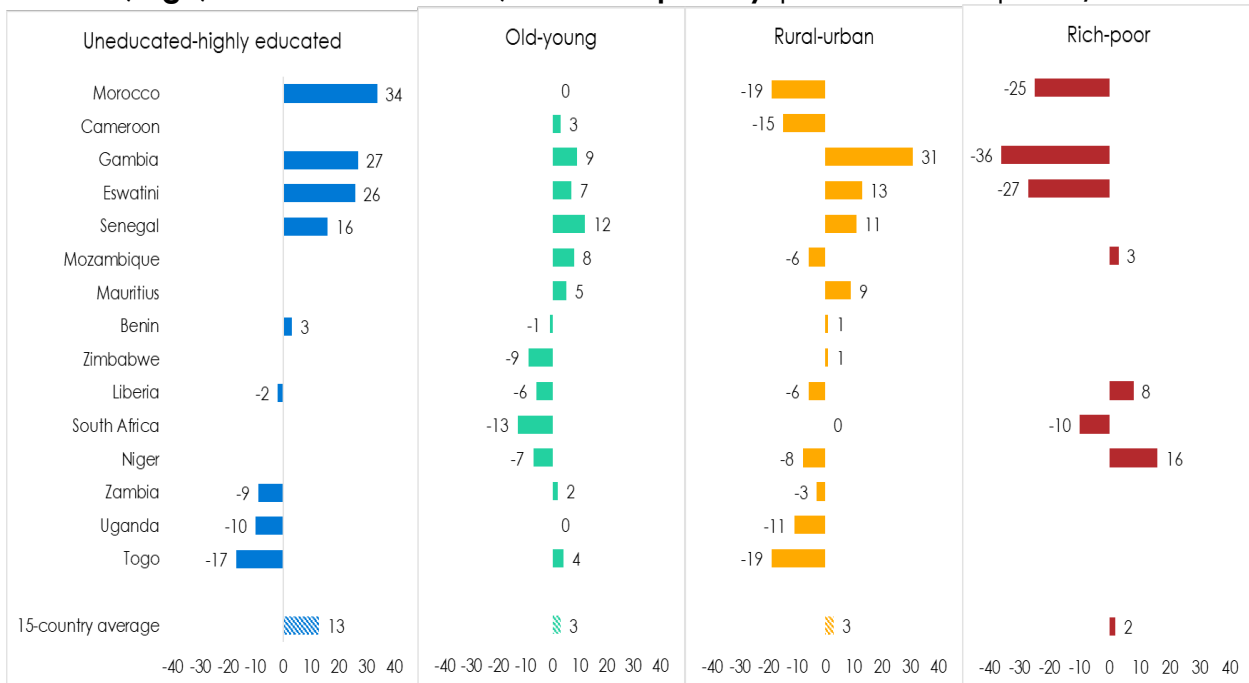**Figure 8: Received COVID-19 relief assistance | by age group | 15* countries | 2020/2021**

Respondents were asked: *Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, have you or your household received any assistance from government, like food, cash payments, relief from bill payments, or other assistance that you were not normally receiving before the pandemic? (% "yes")*
* Question was not asked in Sudan.

Figure 9: Received COVID-19 relief assistance | differences (in percentage points) by education, age, rural-urban location, and lived poverty | 15* countries | 2020/2021

Respondents were asked: Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, have you or your household received any assistance from government, like food, cash payments, relief from bill payments, or other assistance that you were not normally receiving before the pandemic? (% "yes")
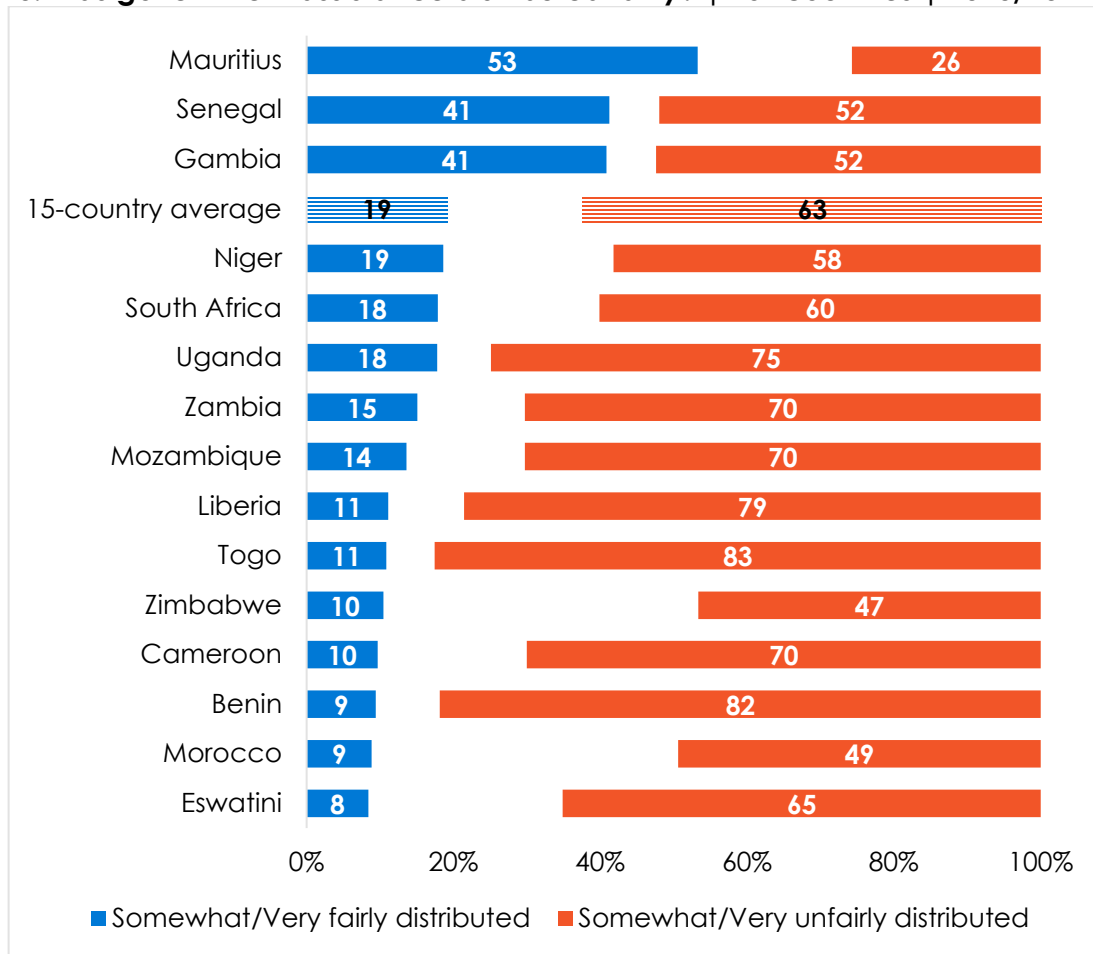**Question was not asked in Sudan.*

Government performance in the response to COVID-19

On average across 15 countries, only about two in 10 citizens (19%) said their government's relief assistance was distributed fairly (Figure 10). Almost two-thirds (63%) of respondents did not think the distribution was handled fairly, including 44% who said it was "very unfair." Mauritius is the only country where a majority (53%) considered the sharing out of assistance fair, while as many as eight in 10 citizens in Togo (83%), Benin (82%), and Liberia (79%) complained about unfair distribution. Even in the Gambia and Senegal, where large majorities reported receiving aid, slim majorities (52% each) said it was given out unfairly.

As might be expected, citizens who reported benefiting from assistance were three times as likely to consider the distribution fair as those who did not receive aid (37% vs. 12%) (Figure 11).

The perception that relief was distributed unfairly was least common among citizens experiencing no lived poverty (40%, compared to 60%-68% among those with low, moderate, or high lived poverty). It was also less prevalent among older citizens (54%, vs. 64% of those aged 18-25) and among those with no formal education (58%, vs. 62% of those with post-secondary education) (Figure 12).
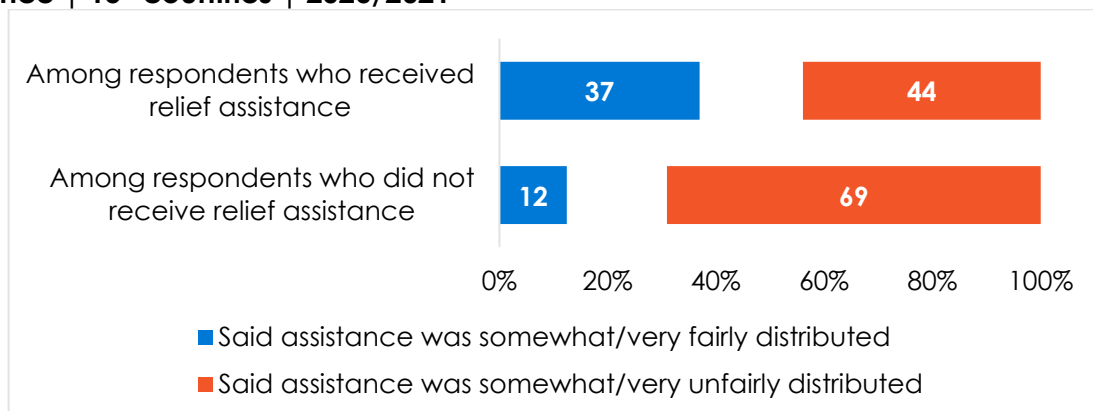
Figure 10: Was government assistance distributed fairly? | 15* countries | 2020/2021

Country	Somewhat/Very fairly distributed	Somewhat/Very unfairly distributed
Mauritius	53	26
Senegal	41	52
Gambia	41	52
15-country average	19	63
Niger	19	58
South Africa	18	60
Uganda	18	75
Zambia	15	70
Mozambique	14	70
Liberia	11	79
Togo	11	83
Zimbabwe	10	47
Cameroon	10	70
Benin	9	82
Morocco	9	49
Eswatini	8	65

■ Somewhat/Very fairly distributed   ■ Somewhat/Very unfairly distributed

Respondents were asked: Do you think that the benefits of government programs to support people during the COVID-19 pandemic, for example through food packages or cash payments, have been distributed fairly, or that the distribution was unfair, for example by favouring certain groups or regions?
* Question was not asked in Sudan.

Figure 11: Government assistance was distributed fairly | by whether respondents received assistance | 15* countries | 2020/2021

	Said fairly	Said unfairly
Among respondents who received relief assistance	37	44
Among respondents who did not receive relief assistance	12	69

■ Said assistance was somewhat/very fairly distributed
■ Said assistance was somewhat/very unfairly distributed

14

Respondents were asked: Do you think that the benefits of government programs to support people during the COVID-19 pandemic, for example through food packages or cash payments, have been distributed fairly, or that the distribution was unfair, for example by favouring certain groups or regions?
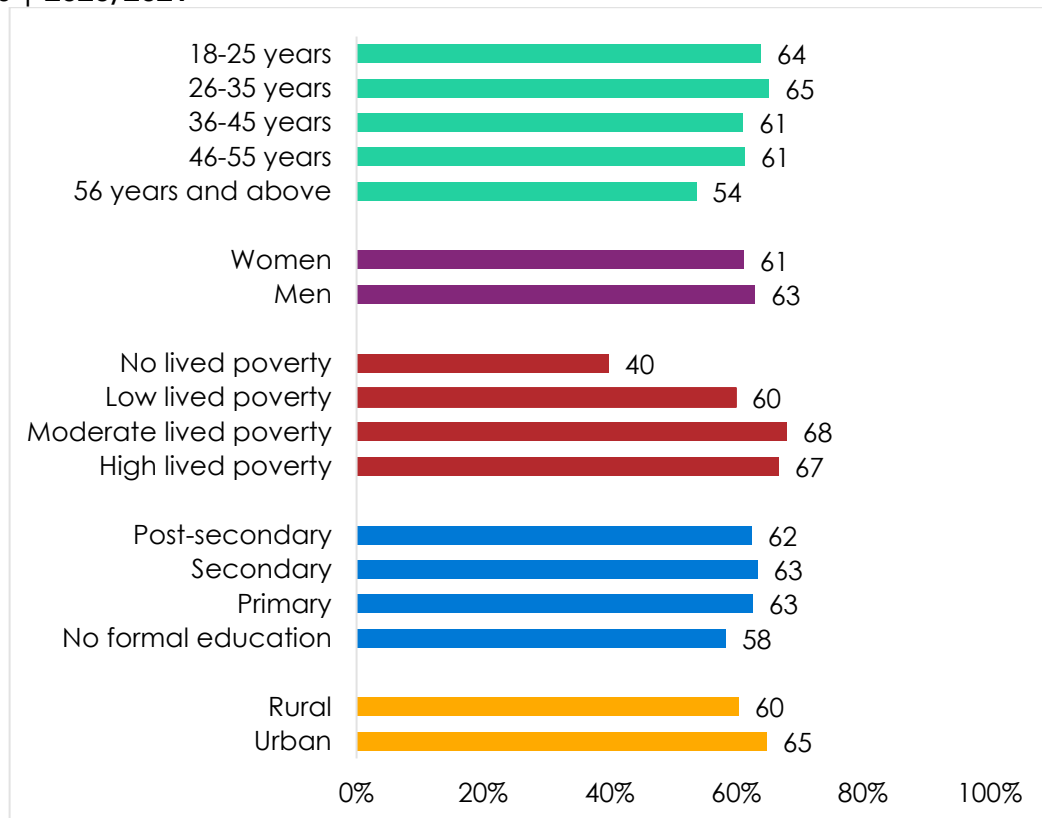** Question was not asked in Sudan.*

Figure 12: Government assistance was not distributed fairly | by demographic group | 15* countries | 2020/2021

Respondents were asked: Do you think that the benefits of government programs to support people during the COVID-19 pandemic, for example through food packages or cash payments, have been distributed fairly, or that the distribution was unfair, for example by favouring certain groups or regions? (% who said "somewhat unfairly" or "very unfairly" distributed")
* Question was not asked in Sudan.

On other aspects of the COVID-19 response, citizens gave their governments mixed ratings (Figure 13).

Fully two-thirds (67%) of respondents said they believe that "some" (24%) or "a lot" (43%) of the resources intended for the COVID-19 response were lost to corruption. This perception was shared by a majority in every surveyed country, ranging up to about eight in 10 citizens in South Africa (85%), Liberia (81%), Uganda (81%), and Eswatini (78%) (Figure 14).

And only 39% of citizens, on average, said they trust government statistics on COVID-19 cases and deaths "somewhat" or "a lot." Mauritius is the only country where a majority (66%) said they trust official COVID-19 numbers (Figure 15). Zimbabweans and Ugandans were about evenly split on this question, while majorities in the other 13 countries – including eight in 10 Sudanese (80%) – expressed

little or no trust in government COVID-19 statistics.
Still, overall, large majorities said their governments had performed "fairly well" or "very well" in managing the pandemic response (68%) and in keeping the public informed about COVID-19 (80%).

Figure 13: Assessment of government performance during the pandemic | 16* countries | 2020/2021
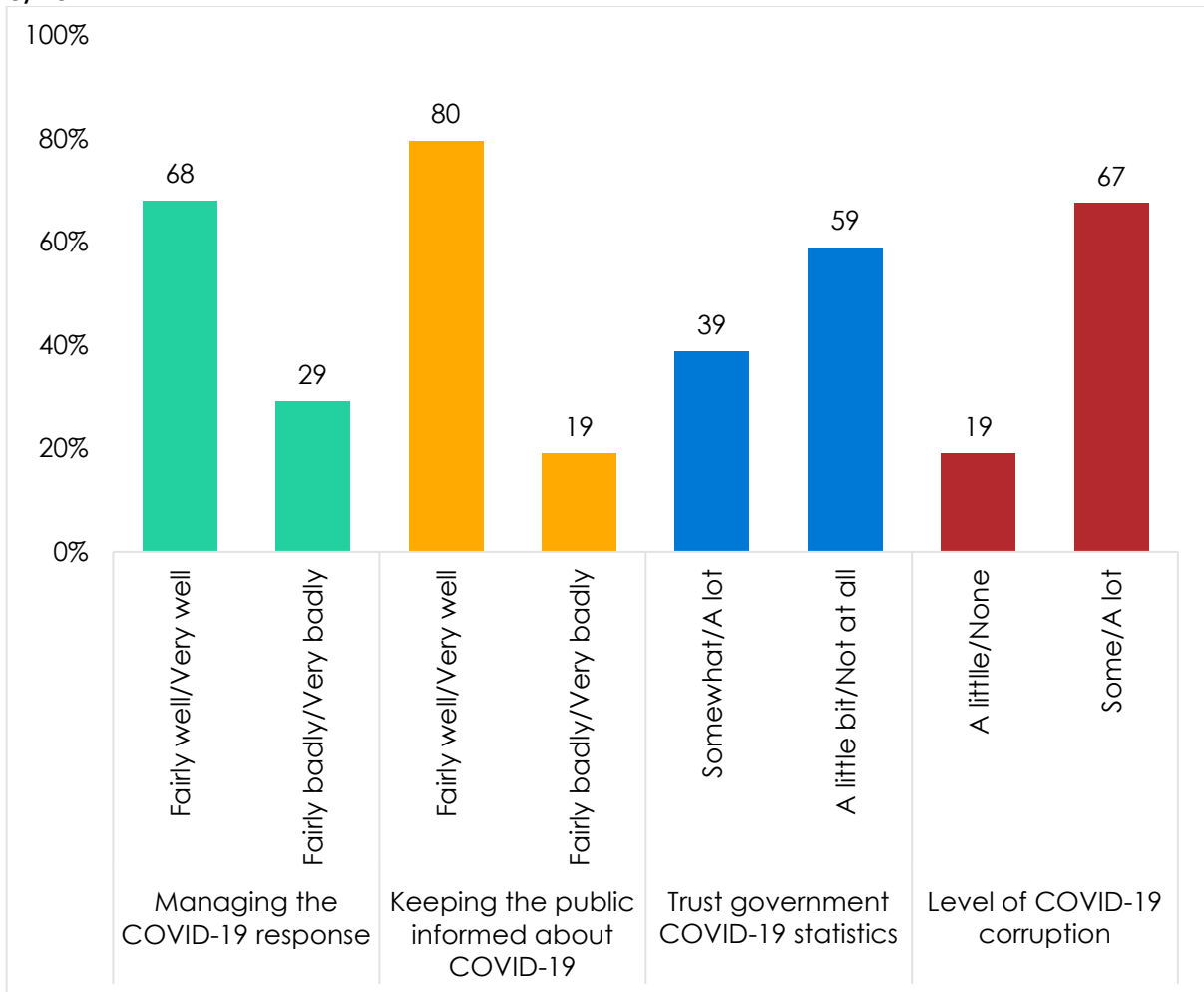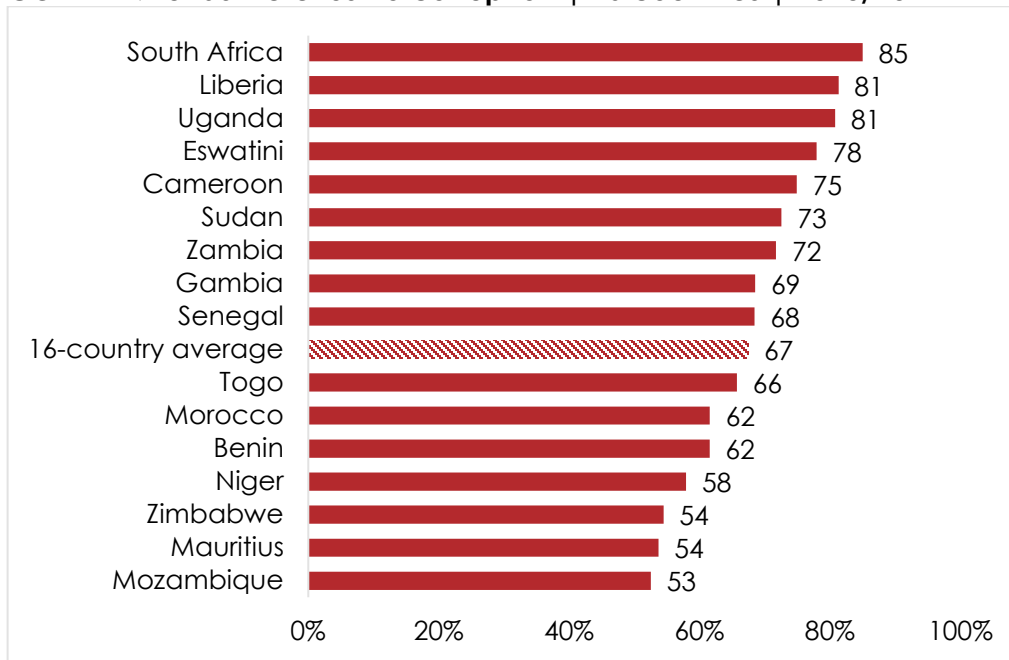

Respondents were asked:
How well or badly would you say the current government has handled the following matters since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, or haven't you heard enough to say: Managing the response to the COVID-19 pandemic? Keeping the public informed about COVID-19?
How much do you trust the official statistics provided by government on the number of infections and deaths due to the COVID-19 pandemic?
Considering all of the funds and resources that were available to the government for combating and responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, how much do you think was lost or stolen due to corruption among government officials?
*Question on keeping the public informed about COVID-19 was not asked in Uganda.

Figure 14: COVID-19 funds were lost to corruption | 16 countries | 2020/2021

Country	Value
South Africa	85
Liberia	81
Uganda	81
Eswatini	78
Cameroon	75
Sudan	73
Zambia	72
Gambia	69
Senegal	68
16-country average	67
Togo	66
Morocco	62
Benin	62
Niger	58
Zimbabwe	54
Mauritius	54
Mozambique	53

x-axis: 0% 20% 40% 60% 80% 100%

Respondents were asked: *Considering all of the funds and resources that were available to the government for combating and responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, how much do you think was lost or stolen due to corruption among government officials? (% who said "some" or "a lot")*
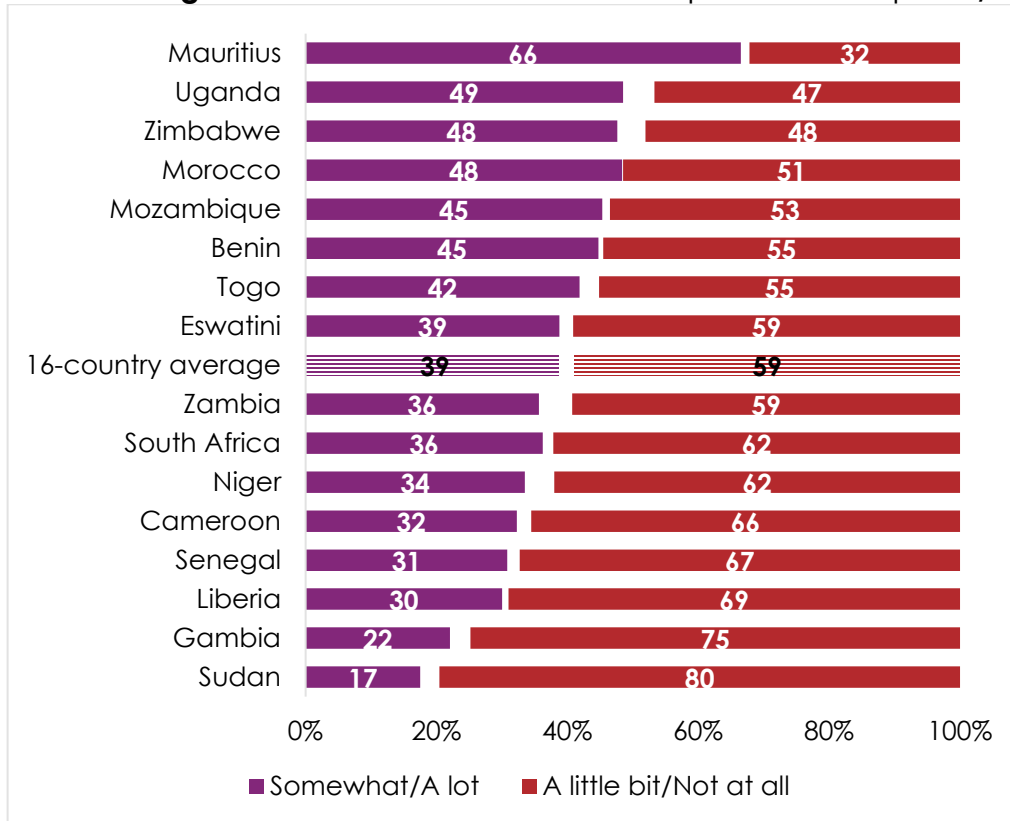
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Figure 15: Trust official government statistics on COVID-19 | 16 countries | 2020/2021
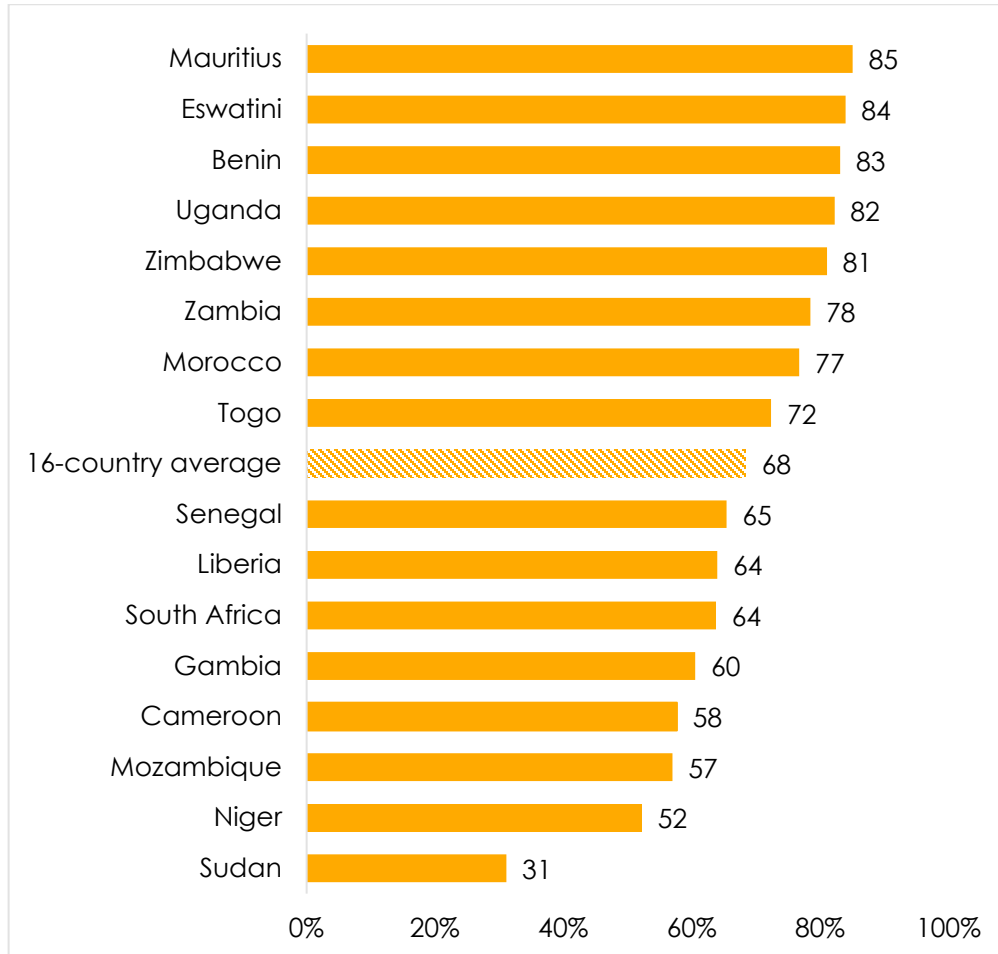

Respondents were asked: *How much do you trust the official statistics provided by government on the number of infections and deaths due to the COVID-19 pandemic?*

Ratings of government performance in managing the COVID-19 response were overwhelmingly favourable in Mauritius (85%), Eswatini (84%), Benin (83%), Uganda (82%), and Zimbabwe (81%) (Figure 16). Majorities approved of their governments' efforts in all surveyed countries except Sudan, where only three in 10 (31%) agreed.

Sudanese also recorded the lowest approval ratings for their government's performance in keeping the public informed about the pandemic (49% fairly/very well vs. 49% fairly/very badly) (Figure 17). At the other extreme, more than nine in 10 citizens approved of their governments' communications efforts in Benin (94%), Zambia (92%), and Eswatini (91%).

Figure 16: Government has managed response to COVID-19 well | 16* countries | 2020/2021

Country	%
Mauritius	85
Eswatini	84
Benin	83
Uganda	82
Zimbabwe	81
Zambia	78
Morocco	77
Togo	72
16-country average	68
Senegal	65
Liberia	64
South Africa	64
Gambia	60
Cameroon	58
Mozambique	57
Niger	52
Sudan	31

Respondents were asked: How well or badly would you say the current government has handled the following matters since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, or haven't you heard enough to say: Managing the response to the COVID-19 pandemic? (% who said "fairly well" or "very well")

Figure 17: Approval of government's performance in keeping the public informed about COVID-19 | 15* countries | 2020/2021
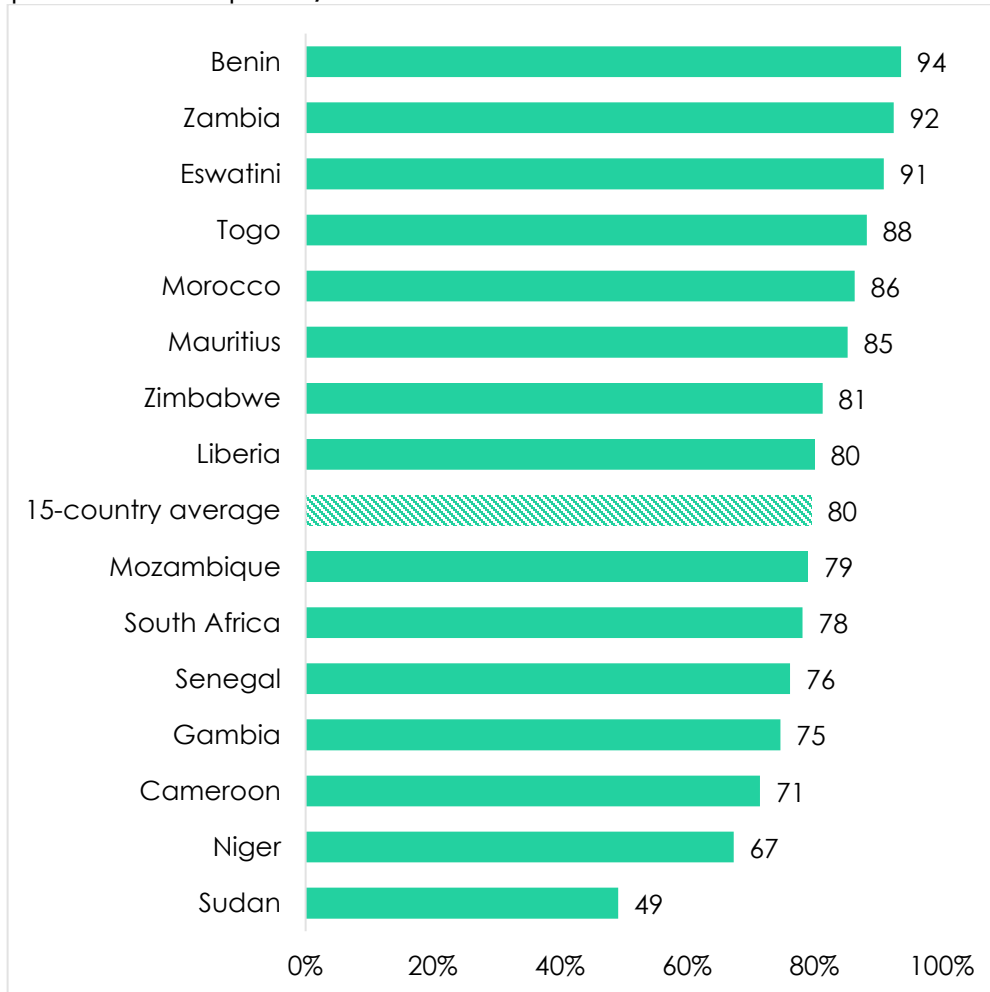

Respondents were asked: How well or badly would you say the current government has handled the following matters since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, or haven't you heard enough to say: Keeping the public informed about COVID-19? (% who said "fairly well" or "very well")
*Question was not asked in Uganda.

Lockdowns and school closures

On average across 14 countries where lockdowns or curfews were imposed, only a quarter (25%) of citizens said they and their households found it easy to comply with the restrictions imposed by their governments to limit the spread of COVID-19 (Figure 18). About seven in 10 (68%) said compliance was difficult, the majority view in all 14 countries, most markedly in Niger (90%) and Liberia (81%). In spite of the difficulty of complying, more than three-fourths (77%) of citizens "agreed" or "strongly agreed" that lockdowns were necessary to fight COVID-19, even if they had a negative impact on the economy and people's livelihoods (Figure 19). Only 13% disagreed with this view. Support for the lockdowns was strong (more than three-fourths of respondents) in all surveyed countries except Senegal (54%) and Niger (49%), where views were more mixed.

Figure 18: Difficulty of complying with lockdown or curfew restrictions | 14 countries* | 2020/2021
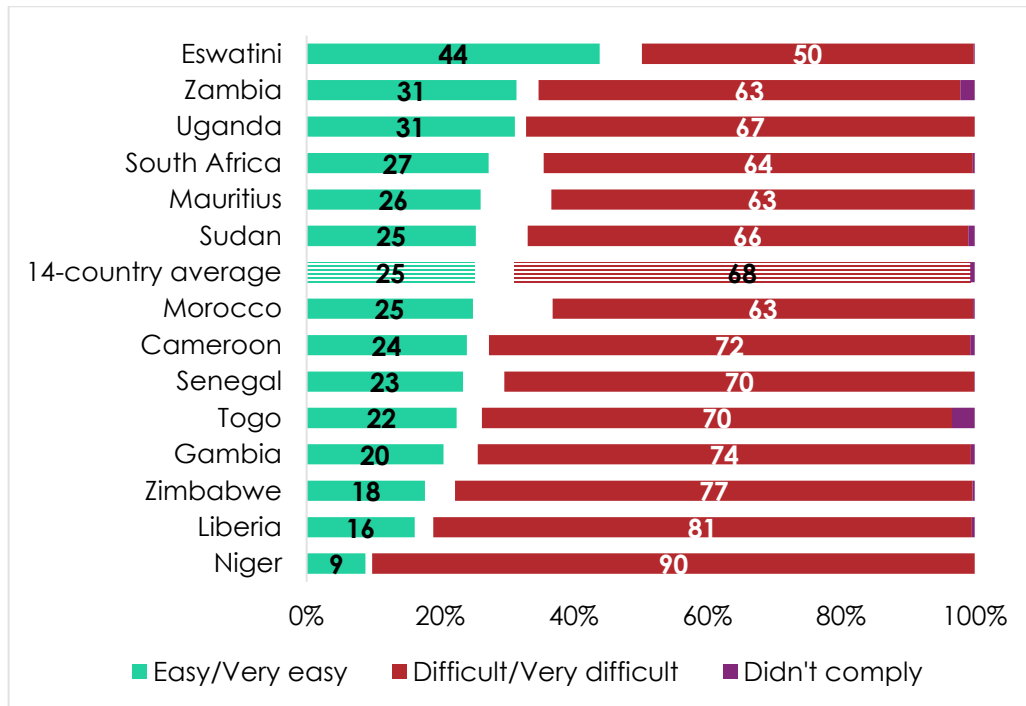
Respondents were asked: How easy or difficult was it for you and your household to comply with the lockdown or curfew restrictions imposed by the government?
Question was not asked in Benin and Mozambique.

**Figure 19: Support for lockdown | 14* countries | 2020/2021**
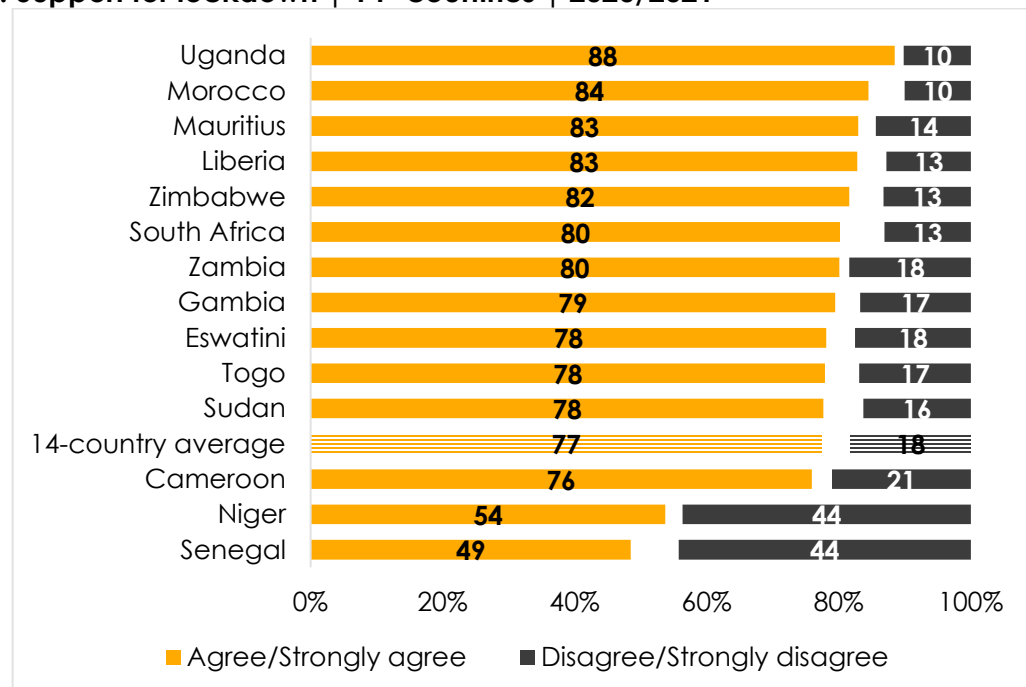
Respondents were asked: Please tell me whether you agree or disagree with the following statement:

Even if the lockdown or curfew had negative impacts on the economy and people's livelihoods, it was necessary to limit the spread of COVID-19?
Question was not asked in Benin and Mozambique.

Support for nationwide school closures was also strong across all 16 countries. About two-thirds (65%) of citizens, on average, said they "somewhat" or "strongly" supported closing the schools, including overwhelming majorities in Mauritius (93%), Uganda (84%), and Zimbabwe (81%) (Figure 20). Views on school closures were less favourable in Niger, Senegal, the Gambia, and Cameroon, where 53%, 50%, 49%, and 47%, respectively, voiced opposition.
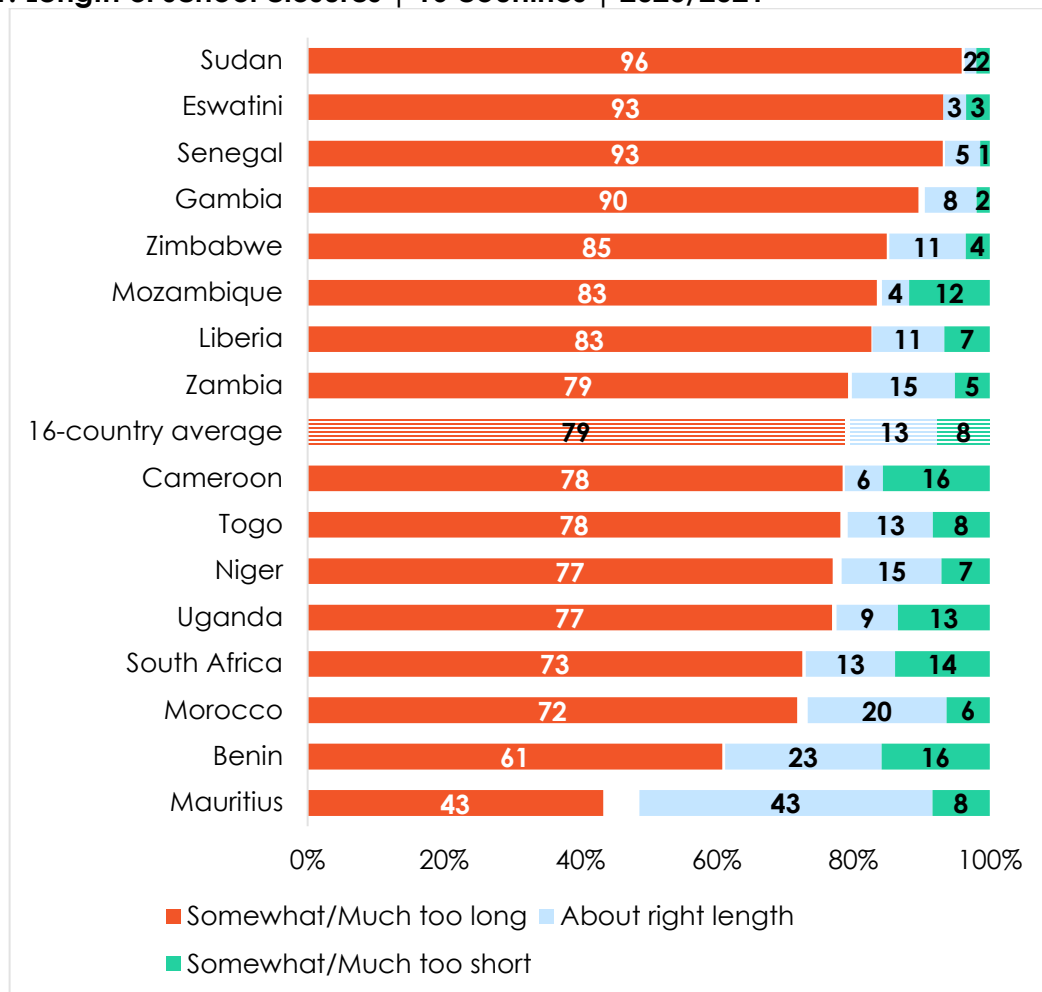
Figure 20: Support for school closures | 16 countries | 2020/2021
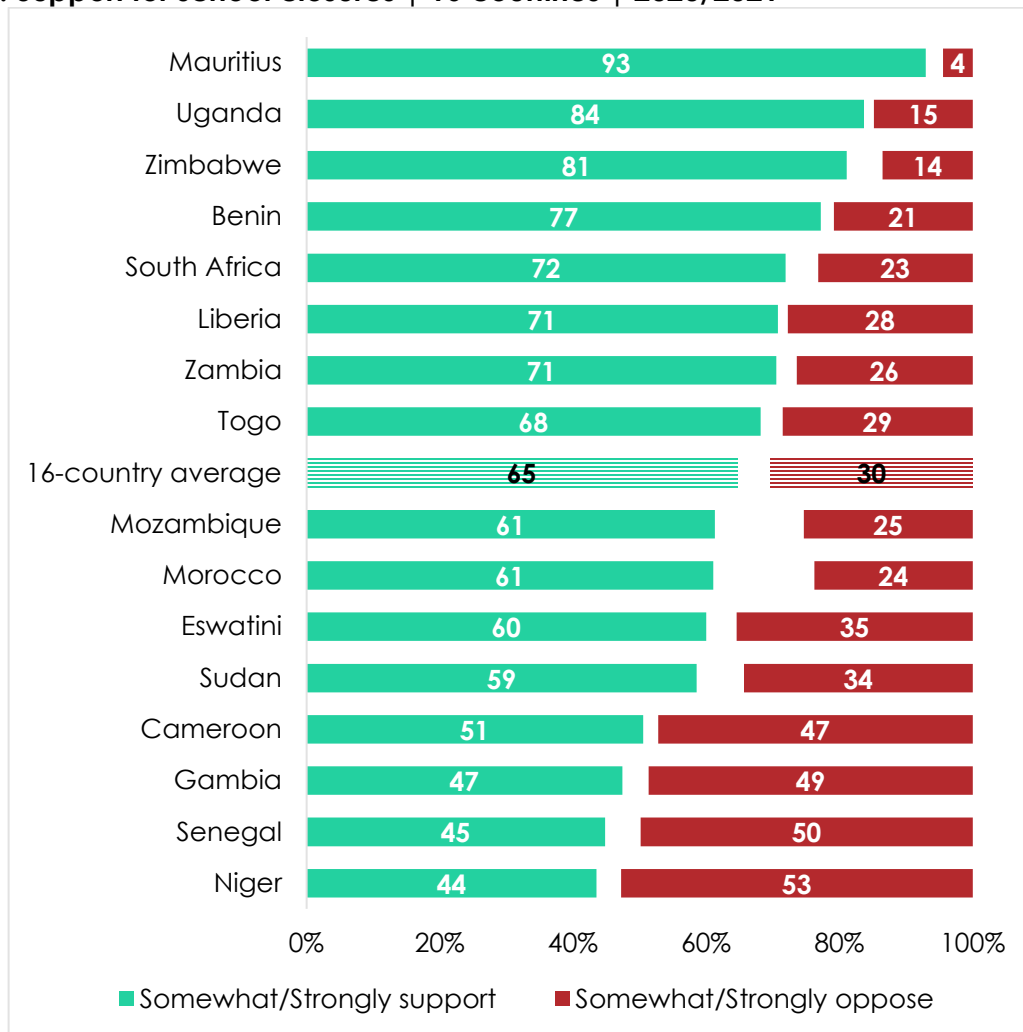
Respondents were asked: *Did you support or oppose the government's decision to close schools in an effort to limit the spread of COVID-19?*

While most citizens supported closing the schools, an even larger majority (79%) said they remained closed "somewhat too long" or "much too long" (Figure 21). This view was strongest in Sudan (96%), Eswatini (93%), Senegal (93%), the Gambia (90%), Zimbabwe (85%), Mozambique (83%), and Liberia (83%). In these countries, school closures lasted between 14 weeks and one year.

Figure 21: Length of school closures | 16 countries | 2020/2021

Country	Somewhat/Much too long	About right length	Somewhat/Much too short
Sudan	96	2	2
Eswatini	93	3	3
Senegal	93	5	1
Gambia	90	8	2
Zimbabwe	85	11	4
Mozambique	83	4	12
Liberia	83	11	7
Zambia	79	15	5
16-country average	79	13	8
Cameroon	78	6	16
Togo	78	13	8
Niger	77	15	7
Uganda	77	9	13
South Africa	73	13	14
Morocco	72	20	6
Benin	61	23	16
Mauritius	43	43	8

■ Somewhat/Much too long ■ About right length
■ Somewhat/Much too short

Respondents were asked*: In your opinion, was the period during which schools were closed too long or too short?*

Restrictions during pandemic

In addition to accepting lockdowns and school closures, many citizens expressed a willingness to tolerate restrictions on certain democratic freedoms, at least temporarily, in the name of security and health.
Seven in 10 (71%) "agreed" or "strongly agreed" that the government is justified in using the police and security forces to enforce public health mandates such as lockdown orders, mask requirements, and restrictions on public gatherings (Figure 22).
A slim majority (53%) would tolerate postponement of elections or limitation of political campaigns. And half (50%) said that censoring the news media was acceptable during a public health emergency like the pandemic, while 44% disagreed.
With the exception of Niger (38%), strong majorities in all surveyed countries would endorse the government's use of security forces to enforce public health restrictions (Figure 23).
Morocco and Liberia stand out for their willingness to accept the use of security forces (89% and 84%, respectively), the postponement of elections (70% and 81%) (Figure 24), and the censoring of the media (90% and 71%) (Figure 25) during public health emergencies. Niger, the Gambia, and

23

Senegal were consistently among the least tolerant of these types of restrictions.

Figure 22: Restrict freedoms during health emergency? | 16 countries | 2020/2021
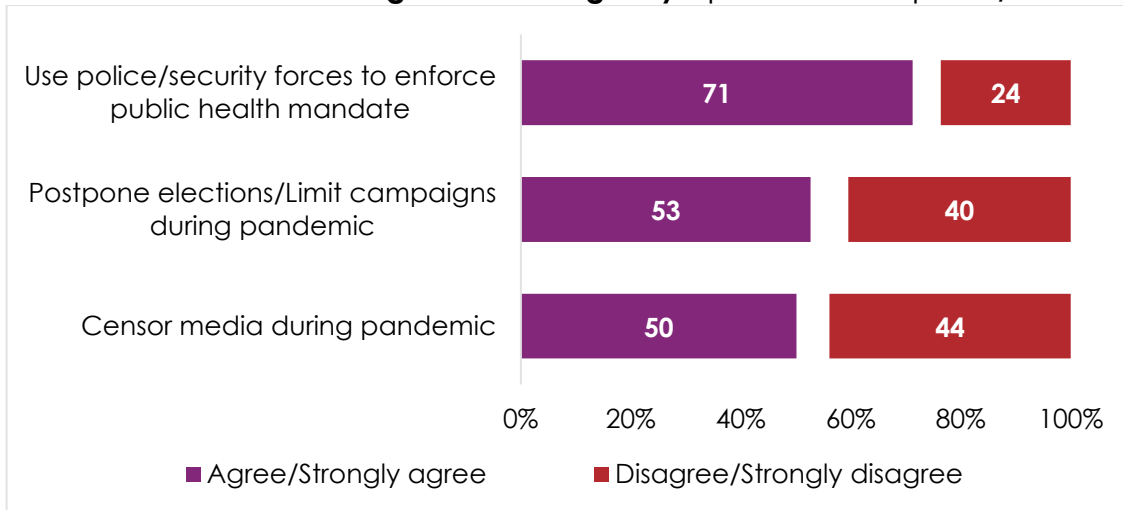
Respondents were asked: When the country is facing a public health emergency like the COVID-19 pandemic, do you agree or disagree that it is justified for the government to temporarily limit democracy or democratic freedoms by taking the following measures: Using the police and security forces to enforce public health mandates like lockdown orders, mask requirements, or restrictions on public gatherings? Postponing elections or limiting political campaigning? Censoring media reporting?

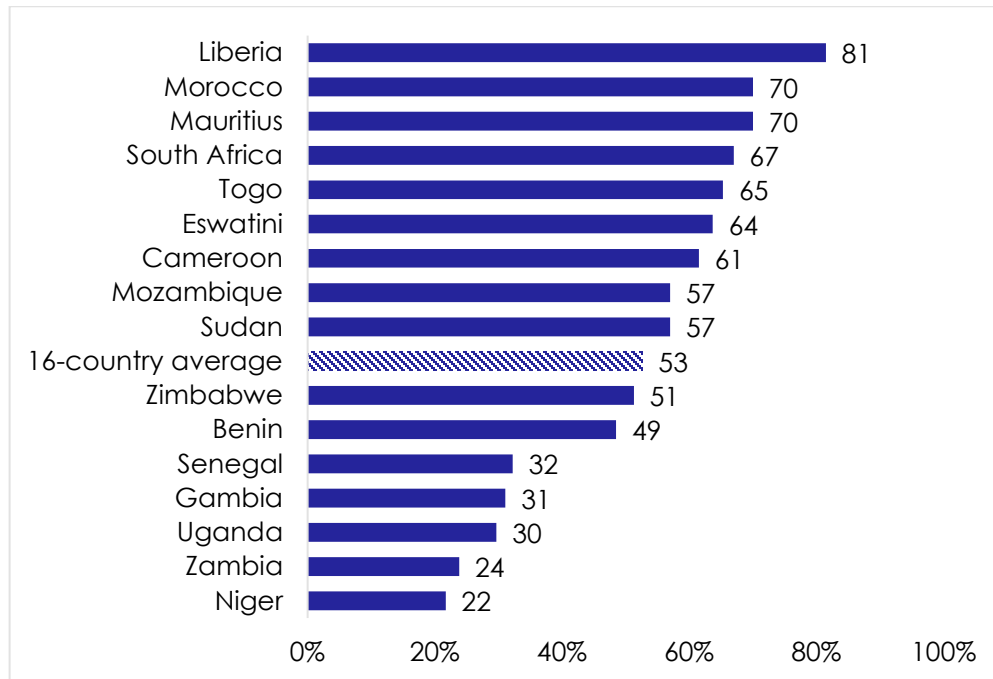**Figure 23: Use security forces to enforce public health mandate | 16 countries | 2020/2021**
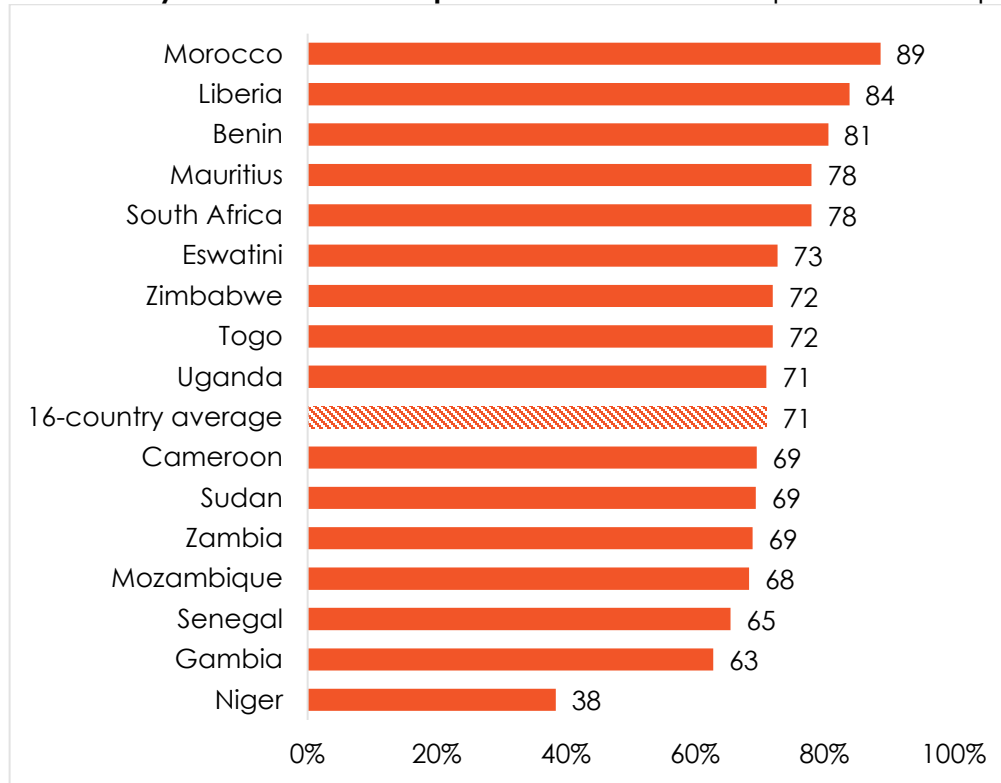
Respondents were asked: When the country is facing a public health emergency like the COVID-19 pandemic, do you agree or disagree that it is justified for the government to temporarily limit democracy or democratic freedoms by taking the following measures: Using the police and security forces to enforce public health mandates like lockdown orders, mask requirements, or restrictions on public gatherings? (% who "agreed" or "strongly agreed")

Figure 24: Postpone elections or limit campaigns during pandemic | 16 countries| 2020/2021
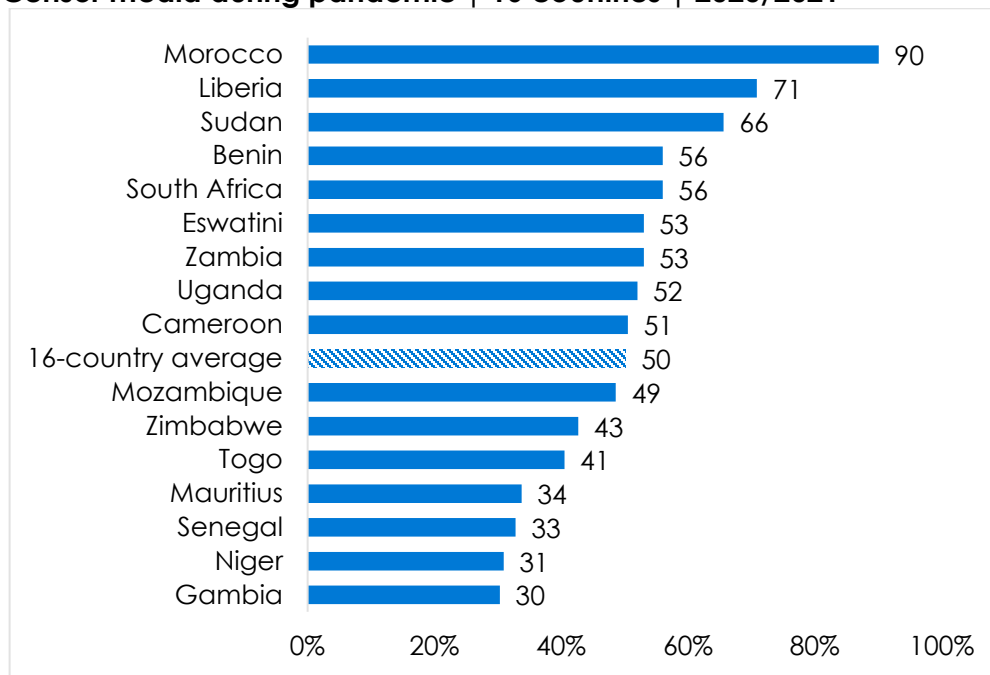

Respondents were asked: When the country is facing a public health emergency like the COVID-19 pandemic, do you agree or disagree that it is justified for the government to temporarily limit democracy or democratic freedoms by taking the following measures: Postponing elections or limiting political campaigning? (% who "agreed" or "strongly agreed")

Figure 25: Censor media during pandemic | 16 countries | 2020/2021

Country	%
Morocco	90
Liberia	71
Sudan	66
Benin	56
South Africa	56
Eswatini	53
Zambia	53
Uganda	52
Cameroon	51
16-country average	50
Mozambique	49
Zimbabwe	43
Togo	41
Mauritius	34
Senegal	33
Niger	31
Gambia	30

Respondents were asked: *When the country is facing a public health emergency like the COVID-19 pandemic, do you agree or disagree that it is justified for the government to temporarily limit democracy or democratic freedoms by taking the following measures: Censoring media reporting? (% who "agreed" or "strongly agreed")*

Asked whether they were concerned that politicians were using the pandemic to increase their power, six in 10 respondents (60%), on average, said they were "somewhat worried" or "very worried" (Figure 26). This concern was shared by seven in 10 Mozambicans (71%), Ugandans (71%), Senegalese (70%), and Mauritians (70%). Only in two countries did majorities say they were "not very worried" or "not at all worried" – Morocco (55%) and Benin (53%).

Figure 26: Worried about politicians using the pandemic to increase their power | 16 countries | 2020/2021
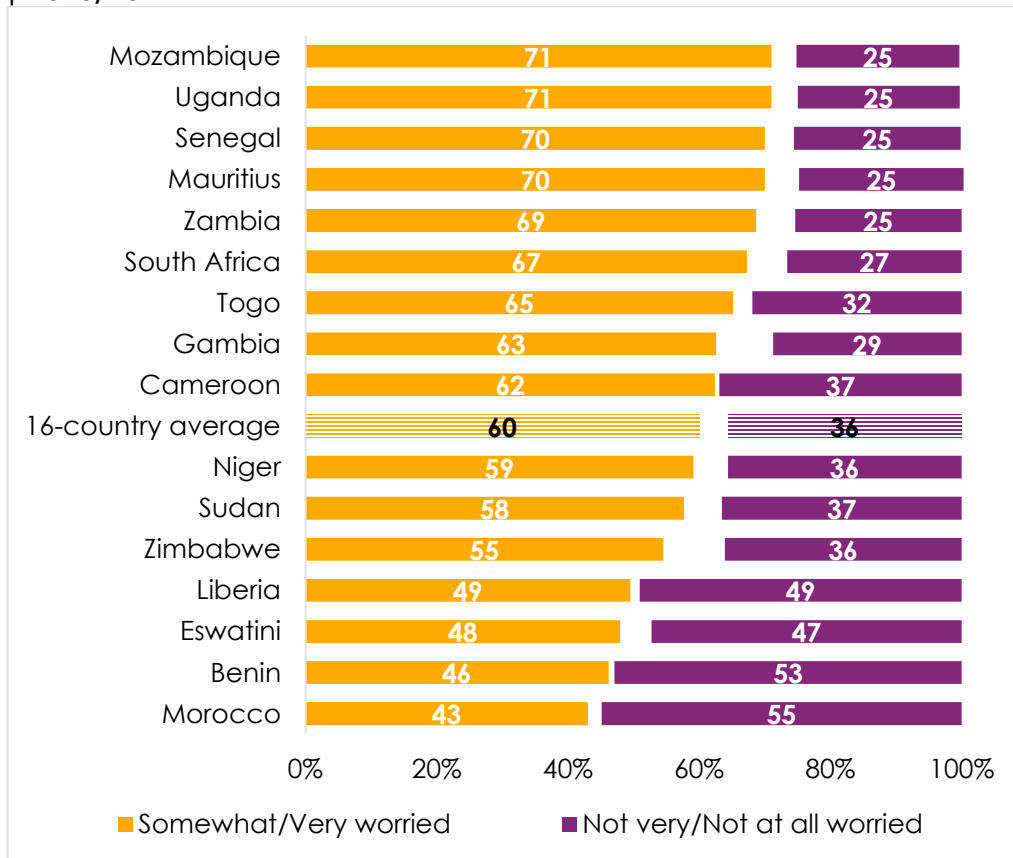
Respondents were asked: How worried are you, if at all, that the following things are taking place or might take place in [your country]: Politicians are using the pandemic as an opportunity to increase their power and authority?

Conclusion

Afrobarometer survey findings suggest that citizens in 16 African countries generally approve of their governments' handling of the COVID-19 pandemic even as they criticise specific aspects of the response. Most clearly, government restrictions, though widely seen as necessary, were hard on families, and relief assistance was neither adequate to help most households nor seen as fair in how it was distributed. The widespread perception of pandemic-related corruption only adds insult to injury.

Citizens also showed themselves willing to put some democratic freedoms on hold during a public health emergency, though they were also wary of politicians' attempts to use the pandemic to increase their power.

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Appendix

Table A.1: Afrobarometer fieldwork dates in countries where Round 8 questions related to COVID-19 were asked

Country	Round 8 fieldwork	Previous survey rounds
Benin	Nov.-Dec. 2020	2005, 2008, 2011, 2014, 2017
Cameroon	Feb.-March 2021	2013, 2015, 2018
Eswatini	March-April 2021	2013, 2015, 2018
Gambia	Feb. 2021	2018
Liberia	Oct.-Dec. 2020	2008, 2012, 2015, 2018
Mauritius	Nov. 2020	2012, 2014, 2017
Morocco	Feb. 2021	2013, 2015, 2018
Mozambique	May-July 2021	2002, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2015, 2018
Niger	Oct.-Nov. 2020	2013, 2015, 2018
Senegal	Dec. 2020-Jan. 2021	2002, 2005, 2008, 2013, 2014, 2017
South Africa	May-June 2021	2000, 2002, 2006, 2008, 2011, 2015, 2018
Sudan	Feb.-April 2021	2013, 2015, 2018
Togo	Dec. 2020-Jan. 2021	2012, 2014, 2017
Uganda	COVID-19 questions were asked in the Uganda Round 8.5 survey, Dec. 2020-Jan. 2021	2000, 2002, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2015, 2017, 2019
Zambia	Nov.-Dec. 2020	1999, 2003, 2005, 2009, 2013, 2014, 2017
Zimbabwe	April-May 2021	1999, 2004, 2005, 2009, 2012, 2014, 2017

Author

Josephine Appiah-Nyamekye Sanny is Afrobarometer knowledge translation manager. Email: jappiah@afrobarometer.org.

About Data for Governance Alliance

The Data for Governance Alliance is a four-year project that promotes data-based advocacy and engagement between pan-African civil society organisations (CSOs) and African Union organs. The project is led by Afrobarometer with partners, including CDD Ghana, the Institute for Development Studies at the University of Nairobi, the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation and Laws.Africa. The project is funded by the European Union.

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